

Budget Editorial

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Budgets reflect our priorities and values

A guest editorial by State Superintendent Tony Evers

During these tough economic times, we cannot balance our state budget on the backs of our children. The 2011-13 state budget awaiting action in the Legislature makes a statement about spending priorities. This budget will result in teacher layoffs and larger class sizes.

At legislative budget hearings held in several communities across the state, hundreds of citizens testified against this budget plan for education over the next two years. Those who spoke objected to the cut of \$840 million in state aid for schools and the elimination of \$1.7 billion in revenue authority to pay for the increased costs of running our schools. These cuts to education come in a budget that increases overall spending by 1.7 percent and includes a 250 percent jump in the transportation budget. New highways can wait, children cannot.

How can we pretend to value our local public schools when this proposed budget increases funding for voucher and independent charter schools by \$40 million while flat funding aid for special education students? The proposed budget would remove the income cap on the choice program, subsidizing wealthy Milwaukee parents who send their children to private schools, while cutting aid for Head Start and school day milk for students across the state. This budget values the private and the well-off over working-class citizens and public school children. This is not a budget for Wisconsin, at least not the Wisconsin I grew up in and love.

I know our economy is still struggling, but this is not a budget of shared sacrifice. This budget places undue burden on our children whose education today is an investment in a better tomorrow. I am ready to work with legislators to align the 2011-13 budget priorities with those of Wisconsin citizens and to protect our schools from the massive cuts this proposed budget would require. Our children didn't cause the economic downturn; they shouldn't disproportionately suffer the consequences of it.

One step we can take that will build a better future for education is to improve the fairness of our school finance system. It is broken. Though resources are scarce, we can do better at allocating state funding for public schools. With changes to this budget, the Legislature could make our school funding more transparent by adopting

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my “Fair Funding for Our Future” recommendations. Even in these tough times, we can fix our school finance system. I am ready to work with legislators to fix the funding system for our schools.

The Wisconsin I know and love values its children and its public schools. We need a biennial budget that is fair and equitable and doesn’t undercut the quality of our children’s education. I know resources are scarce, but budgeting in good times and bad is about choices, about aligning resources with our values. We can and must do better for the children in our public schools.

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Tony Evers is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.

NOTES: A high-resolution photo of the state superintendent is available on the Department of Public Instruction “Media Contacts and Resources” webpage at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/vm-media.html>. This news release is available at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpinr2011_39.pdf.